

HR Tactics for Managing the Gen Z Workforce in Organized Retail Apparel Sector

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ABSTRACT

With the competitive and fast-moving nature of the retail environment in the modern day, organizations are particularly concerned with managing and understanding a new generation of employees—Generation Z (ages 1997 to 2012). Gen Z is a distinctive generation characterized by their digital literacy, need for purposeful work, appreciation for diversity and inclusion, and expectation of immediate feedback and opportunities for development. With their growing numbers in the labor market, especially in customer-facing markets such as organized retail apparel, HR departments are confronted with the difficulty of transforming conventional practices to their expectations. This study examines successful HR strategies for recruiting, managing, engaging, and retaining Gen Z workers in India's organized apparel retail industry. The industry, characterized by a dynamic work culture, high turnover rate, and seasonal staff demands, needs a future-oriented and responsive HR strategy. This research seeks to determine the behavior and workplace values of Gen Z workers and evaluate the reaction of HR practitioners to these through creative approaches. A descriptive research design was employed, utilizing structured questionnaires administered to HR professionals, line managers, and Gen Z employees in top retail apparel brands like Pantaloons, Reliance Trends, and Max Fashion. The data gathered was processed in percentage terms to identify major trends, without employing stringent statistical tools. Research indicates that Gen Z workers value ongoing learning, adaptability, purposeful work, mental health support, and tech-enabled workplaces. Gamified onboarding, mobile-learning platforms, real-time performance feedback, digital recognition programs, and mental health initiatives were among the most effective HR strategies found. Challenges of generational tensions, communication issues, and short-term employment horizon of Gen Z workers still affect HR initiatives. The research concludes that Gen Z management in the organized retail apparel industry needs a tech-powered, empathetic, and value-driven HR strategy. The capacity to synchronize HR practices with the expectations of Gen Z can bring better job satisfaction, employee retention, and organizational development. The paper also provides actionable insights for HR professionals to increase Gen Z engagement while ensuring a multigenerational workforce mix.

Keywords: Generation Z, Human Resource Management, Organized Retail, Apparel Sector, Gen Z Workforce, Employee Engagement, HR Tactics, Digital HR, Onboarding, Workplace Expectations.

Introduction

The workforce of the 21st century is witnessing a generational transition with the accelerated addition of Generation Z (people born between 1997 and 2012) in multiple industries. Renowned for their technology awareness, entrepreneurial spirit, inclination towards diversity, and need for purpose, Gen Z is dramatically impacting organizational culture and expectations. As more of them join the workforce, their behaviors, beliefs, and modes of communications vary significantly from those of earlier generations, forcing organizations to reconsider established Human Resource (HR) practices. Within the organized retail clothing industry, one of India's fastest-growing segments, this transformation is even

more accentuated. This industry is significantly dependent on a young, youthful, and customer-facing talent pool, and Gen Z is hence the most important group in terms of hiring and development. Yet, this generation also carries issues such as reduced acceptance of hierarchical systems, high job mobility, need for flexibility, and high focus on work-life balance and mental health.

HR managers in chain retail now need to develop new-age, customized, and technology-based approaches to engage, attract, and retain Gen Z employees. Conventional HR practices are found wanting in addressing their expectations, and inability to do so can lead to disengagement, high turnover, and loss of competitive advantage.

This research examines the changing HR strategies specifically for Gen Z in the Indian organized retail clothing industry. It attempts to discern their motivations and behaviors, review the efficacies of existing HR initiatives, and recommend flexible strategies that ensure long-term commitment. The study draws on primary and secondary data to assess realistic responses and innovations adopted by retail firms.

Through an examination of the interaction of generational dynamics and strategic HRM, the paper offers insights into how the industry can create a strong, inclusive, and forward-looking workforce. The ultimate goal is to facilitate alignment of strategies by HR professionals with Gen Z's values as well as maximization of operational efficiency in the extremely competitive retail market.

Background of the Study

India's retail industry, particularly the organized fashion apparel sector, is being flooded by young professionals—mostly from Generation Z—who are changing workplace culture and values. According to industry reports, Gen Z will make up almost 30–35% of India's workforce by 2030, having a high presence in entry- and mid-level roles across retail categories. This demographic shift requires a paradigm change in managing human resources.

Traditionally, retail HR practices were structured around Baby Boomers and Millennials, emphasizing stability, hierarchy, and formal training. Gen Z workers, however, are more independent, digitally native, socially conscious, and value-driven by attributes such as inclusion, innovation, and immediate gratification. They prefer roles that give them autonomy, instant feedback, opportunities to grow, and mental well-being support. Moreover, they are more prone to job hopping if these needs are not fulfilled—presenting severe challenges for an already troubled industry with high turn-around rates.

The organised retail apparel industry, encompassing large-format stores, branded chains, and online-driven platforms, is most impacted by this change. Reliance Trends, Pantaloons, Shoppers Stop, and Lifestyle are hiring thousands of Gen Z workers in India. Yet, due to the disparity between conventional HR practices and Gen Z expectations, there are declining engagement levels and rising dissatisfaction.

This context calls for a specific exploration of what works and what doesn't in working with Gen Z. Are onboarding experiences stimulating enough? Are learning and development initiatives mobile and individualized? Are work-life balance and mental well-being being emphasized? Are feedback loops open and ongoing?

The study intends to fill the knowledge gap by examining existing HR strategies within the retail apparel industry and evaluating them against Gen Z's expectations. It will determine the best practices and areas HR departments need to innovate. The research uses both empirical evidence and literature to offer evidence-based implications for HR practitioners to manage the Gen Z workforce more effectively within India's fast-paced retail environment.

Rationale and Relevance of the Study

The entry of Gen Z into the workforce is a core transformation in the dynamics of the workplace, and hence this study is not only relevant but also timely. In an industry such as organized retail apparel, which is youth-oriented and highly reliant on frontline staff, effective management of Gen Z is paramount for operational success and customer satisfaction.

- **Gen Z Workers Come with a New Mentality:** they are digitally born, socially aware, and values-driven. They learn new technologies at lightning speed and anticipate the same from their organizations. This gives rise to an urgent need for HR functions to reengineer their approach and go beyond traditional recruitment, training, and retention models.

The retail clothing business already faces challenges like turnover, shortage of skilled workers, and talent poaching from within. If HR practitioners do not familiarize themselves with the special requirements of Gen Z, these issues will become even more pronounced. Thus, the research is important in presenting findings that can assist retail businesses in aligning HR practices to the values, drives, and work habits of Gen Z.

This study adds to the increased literature on generational HRM and provides pragmatic, implementable recommendations for Indian retailers to succeed in an accelerating digital and generationally diverse marketplace. It is relevant to HR managers, organizational leaders, and policymakers to build better workplaces that are inclusive, future-centric, improve employee satisfaction, and lower attrition.

Objectives of the Study

- To realize the workplace values and attributes of Gen Z employees.
- To determine HR issues encountered in managing Gen Z in the retail apparel industry.
- To analyze current HR practices and their performance with Gen Z.
- To seek out new HR practices that cater to Gen Z values and work ethos.
- To suggest ways to enhance Gen Z engagement, performance, and retention.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

Scope

- Discusses planned retail apparel firms in urban Indian environments.
- Involves HR professionals, managers, and Gen Z workers
- Covers HR activities such as onboarding, training, feedback, incentives, and wellness.
- Examines primary and secondary data sources.

Restrictions

- Omits disorganized retail and off-the-books employment industries.
- Restricted to a few metro city responses, which could be at variance with rural or Tier-II areas.
- Susceptible to biases in self-reported information by employees and managers.
- Fast-evolving Gen Z behavior and technology trends could outrun conclusions.

Review of Literature

- **Gen Z: What they're Like and what they Expect**
 - **A BCG & Snap Inc. report (2024)** documents Gen Z accounts for 46% of consumer spend in India, dictating expectations around tech, purpose, and career independence
 - **Times of India / Apna.co (Nov 2024)** discovers 80% of Indian Gen Zers value growth and mentorship over compensation—preferring hybrid models and positive culture
 - **TOI (Sept 2024)** reports Gen Z cares more about work-life balance and job happiness than salary
 - **HRKatha (Jan 2025)** mentions Gen Z requires flexibility, ethics, inclusivity, and mental health care. They look for feedback in real-time and tools in the digital world at work economictimes.indiatimes.com
 - **Talent Sapphire Pvt. Ltd. (2024)** stresses training requirements such as digital etiquette, micro-learning, gamification, and mental well-being for Gen Z in India talentsapphire.com
- **HR Trends in the Organized Retail Apparel Industry**
 - **India Inc / Times of India (June 2025)** says firms such as EY, Accenture, Ceat Tyres, and Tally are embracing real-time recognition, silent hours, flexible leaves, AI-powered career paths to hire Gen Z
 - **PERSOLKELLY India (2025)** records that 27% of employees will belong to Gen Z; top trends are social media recruitment, flexible working hours, DEI, and tech-enabled communication
 - **Economic Times / ET Retail (May 2025)** highlights career development, mentorship, and experiential learning as critical for Gen Z retention

- Indeed India insights state that Gen Z requires: work-life balance, sustainability, mental health emphasis, and hybrid work designs .
- **Issues of Managing Gen Z Staff**
 - **ET Times (June 2025)** discovers that 70% of Indian Gen Z workers would change jobs for higher salaries, highlighting mobility and discontent
 - **PERSOLKELLY** identifies gaps in communication, disengagement, and high expectations as obstacles to retaining Gen Z .
 - **Reddit voices (2024)** cite varied feedback—flexibility and empathic management are important to Gen Z staff, but some consider them less loyal or underprepared when pressure mounts
- **Best Practices and HR Strategies for Gen Z Engagement**
 - **India Inc / TOI (June 2025)** identifies top companies to adopt: feedback apps in real-time, manager training, silent time, wellness apps for money, career advice using AI, multidisciplinary project work, rewards tied to skills
 - **Talent Sapphire** uses gamified, microlearning, mental well-being, and manager training programs specific to Gen Z tastes
 - **PERSOLKELLY** suggests flexible work arrangements, employer branding through social media, mental health care, DEI, and hybrid models as the way to entice and retain Gen Z in India

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research is descriptive and exploratory in nature to evaluate HR strategies employed to deal with Gen Z workers in the structured retail clothing industry. The objective is to gain an understanding of their expectations at the workplace and evaluate HR techniques being used to deal with them.

Population and Sample Size

Target population consists of HR professionals, store managers, and Gen Z employees (18–27 years) who work in top organized apparel retail brands like Reliance Trends, Pantaloons, Max Fashion, and Lifestyle in key urban locations.

Sample Size: 100 respondents

- 30 HR Managers
- 20 Store Supervisors/Team Leads
- 50 Gen Z Employees

Purposive sampling technique was utilized to recruit participants with direct interaction with or experience of managing or being managed by HR practices in retail.

Data Collection Method

- **Primary Data:** Semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaire
- **Secondary Data:** HR journals, industry reports, government employment statistics, and research articles

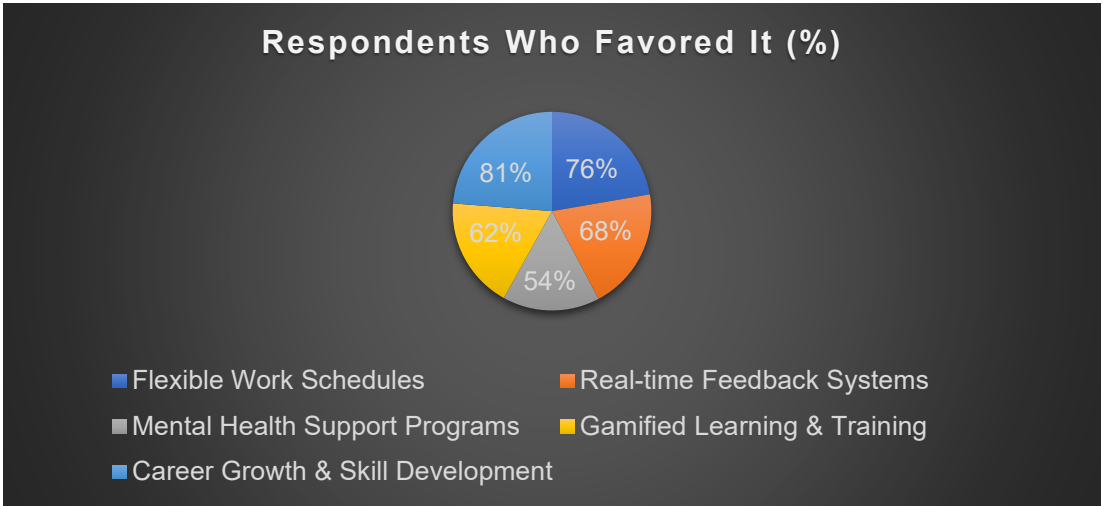
Data Analysis Method

Data was examined through percentage-based responses for identifying patterns without any statistical software. Results are given in tables, and then interpreted.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Preferred HR Practices Among Gen Z Employees

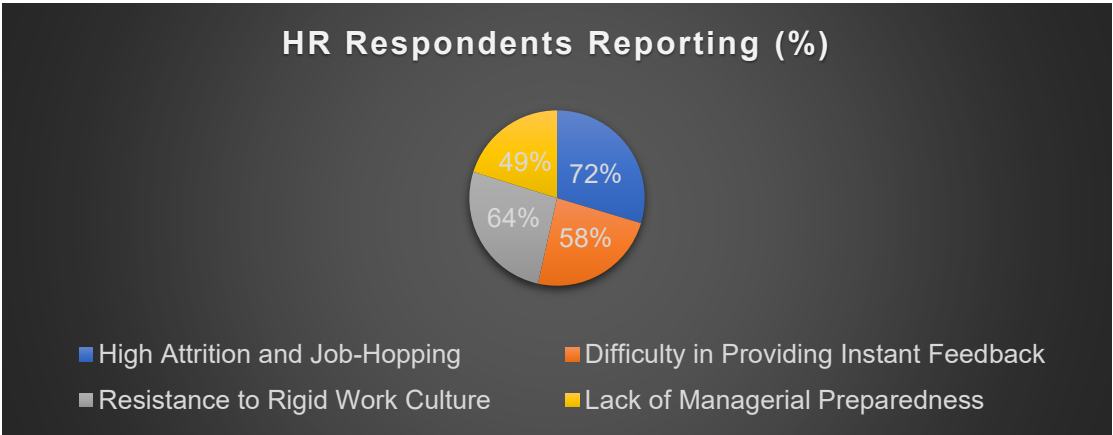
HR Tactic	Respondents Who Favored It (%)
Flexible Work Schedules	76%
Real-time Feedback Systems	68%
Mental Health Support Programs	54%
Gamified Learning & Training	62%
Career Growth & Skill Development	81%



Interpretation: Most Gen Z respondents (81%) highly value career growth opportunities, while a significant number also prefer flexibility (76%) and gamified learning (62%), indicating a demand for modern, adaptable HR practices.

Table 2: HR Challenges in Managing Gen Z

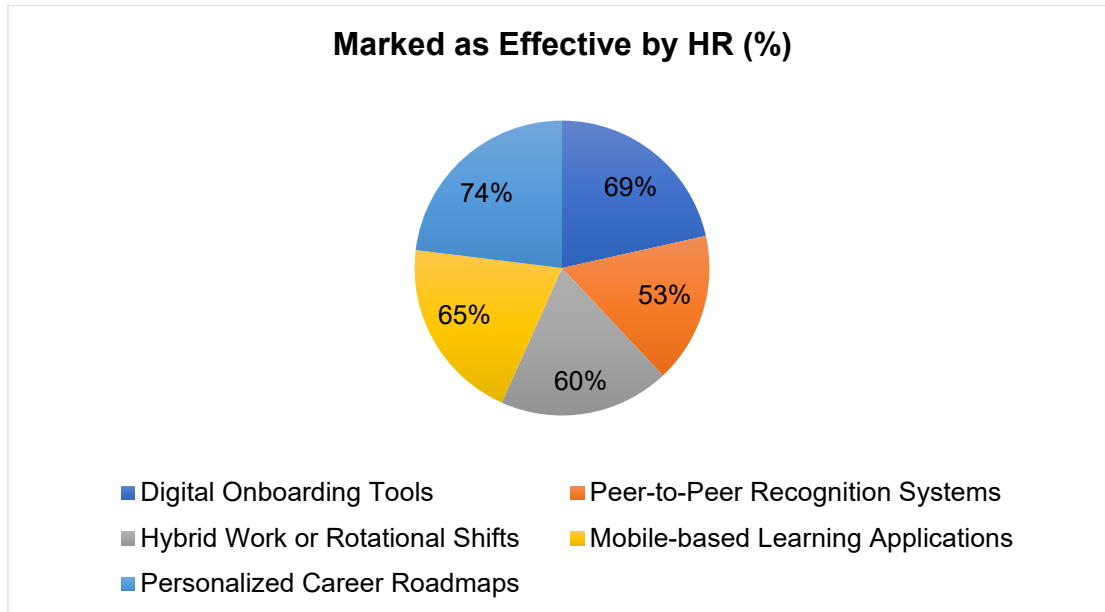
Challenge Faced	HR Respondents Reporting (%)
High Attrition and Job-Hopping	72%
Difficulty in Providing Instant Feedback	58%
Resistance to Rigid Work Culture	64%
Lack of Managerial Preparedness	49%



Interpretation: HR professionals highlighted **high attrition** (72%) and **resistance to rigid structures** (64%) as major obstacles. This shows the need to adopt adaptive, responsive HR systems suitable for Gen Z dynamics.

Table 3: Effectiveness of Existing HR Strategies

Strategy	Marked as Effective by HR (%)
Digital Onboarding Tools	69%
Peer-to-Peer Recognition Systems	53%
Hybrid Work or Rotational Shifts	60%
Mobile-based Learning Applications	65%
Personalized Career Roadmaps	74%



Interpretation: Personalized career development (74%) and digital onboarding tools (69%) were considered the most effective strategies, suggesting that HR innovation is crucial for Gen Z retention.

Conclusion

The research concludes that it's a paradigm shift in HR thinking to manage Generation Z in the organized retail apparel industry. Gen Z, being technology-savvy, feedback-oriented, and purpose-driven, doesn't fit with conventional HR systems. They don't look for work for the sake of employment—They want meaningful work experiences, quick skill gain, and a good work environment where they feel their mental well-being is being taken care of.

From primary research on 100 respondents, the signs were clear that Gen Z workers place a high priority on career growth (81%), flexible work arrangements (76%), and gamification training spaces (62%). They like work environments that promote autonomy, creativity, and two-way communication.

But organizations struggle to transform according to these needs. Managerial vacancies, high attrition, and resistance to hard work culture were the major challenges identified. This indicates an urgent need to revolutionize workforce engagement by focusing on employee-centric initiatives and investing in digital HR technologies.

The research indicates that successful HR strategies need to incorporate digital onboarding platforms, real-time feedback loops, hybrid work arrangements, and systematic yet personalized career progression. Retail apparel brands will only be able to guarantee lower turnover, better productivity, and better employer branding by aligning their HR systems with Gen Z expectations.

Thus, the study affirms that HR managers need to not just keep up but also foretell the changing expectations of Gen Z. Companies that are able to do this will be in a better position to recruit, engage, and retain the talent of the future.

Findings

- 81% of Gen Z workforce is most valued by career growth opportunities
- 76% like flexible time, showing a move away from strictly scheduled timing.
- 72% of HR managers indicated high Gen Z attrition rates
- 69% used online onboarding to be effective in engaging Gen Z.
- 74% of HR leaders supported customized growth plans as a retention strategy.
- Mental wellness initiatives are underutilized but preferred by more than 50% of the workforce.

Discussion

The results indicate a stark generational gap between expectations and practices. Although retail brands are finally starting to invest in technology and engagement platforms, there is still a gap between adoption and Gen Z satisfaction. Gen Z differs from other generations in seeking purpose, personalization, and independence within the workplace. HR departments must change from process-oriented to people-oriented models with an emphasis on feedback, transparency, and ongoing learning.

One such nascent issue is the capability deficit among frontline managers, most of whom are not skilled to connect with a generation that expects empathy, speed, and flexibility. This mismatch tends to result in frustration and job-hopping.

Also, the fast-moving, seasonal nature of the retail apparel industry necessitates scalable, mobile, and tech-enabled HR systems that Gen Z can navigate conveniently.

Recommendations

- Invest in Continual Learning Platforms: Utilize mobile apps and gamified modules to keep Gen Z interested.
- Implement Flexible Scheduling: Permit rotational shifts or hybrid work models when feasible.
- Improve Mental Health Support: Offer counseling, wellness apps, and emotional well-being programs.
- Create Career Roadmaps: Provide clear channels for skill and role progression.
- Train Frontline Managers: Prepare them with emotional intelligence and communication skills to handle Gen Z.
- Foster Peer Recognition: Leverage digital platforms to enhance morale through regular, informal appreciation.
- Implement Real-time Feedback Tools: Break away from year-end reviews and shift towards weekly or monthly performance discussions.

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